



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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Fact Sheet

THE CASTORENA FAMILY CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION

One of the Largest Counterfeit Identity Organizations Ever Targeted by U.S. Authorities

According to public court documents filed by the U.S. government in Colorado and in other judicial districts around the country, the Castorena Family Organization (CFO) is a large-scale criminal organization with more than 100 key members who oversee cells of 10 to 20 individuals in cities across the United States. Several of the senior leaders of the organization are believed to be based in Mexico.

The organization is alleged to be involved in the manufacture and distribution of high-quality counterfeit identity documents, including social security cards, birth certificates, marriage certificates, U.S. and Mexican driver's licenses, Matricula Consular ID cards, resident alien cards, work authorization documents, proof of vehicle insurance cards, temporary vehicle registration documents, and utility bills.

Court documents indicate that the CFO started out in Los Angeles in the late 1980s, manufacturing and selling counterfeit alien registration and social security cards. The organization soon expanded its counterfeit document operations to other cities across the United States, including New York City, Chicago, Las Vegas, Denver, Atlanta, Albuquerque, and other cities.

Over the past decade, the CFO has been managed by six Castorena-Ibarra siblings: Pedro, Alfonso, Jose, Maria, Francisco Javier, and Raquel, according to court documents. During the last several years, three of these siblings, Pedro, Maria and Francisco Javier, have maintained direct involvement in the counterfeiting operations of the CFO in Denver and elsewhere. In recent years, several of these siblings have been arrested and prosecuted in the United States. Others have fled to Mexico to avoid U.S. prosecution.

The CFO has been the target of ICE investigations in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Miami, Dallas, San Antonio, Las Vegas, Albuquerque, Denver, Lincoln, NE, and Des Moines, IA.

For example, ICE investigations of the CFO in Los Angeles in the late 1990s resulted in the seizure of millions of counterfeit documents with an estimated street value of \$20 million. The documents were linked to more than 400 investigations and seizures in more than 50 cities in 33 states. The American Express Corporation attributed more than \$2 million in losses to counterfeit identification documents that were traced to the CFO just in Los Angeles.

In Denver, ICE investigations into the CFO have resulted in the criminal prosecution of more than 50 individuals. Dozens of additional members of the CFO in Denver have been arrested and deported to Mexico, Colombia, and El Salvador. ICE agents in Denver have also been responsible for the seizure of at least 20 computerized laboratories affiliated with the CFO and used to manufacture high-quality counterfeit identity documents. Agents have also seized 21 computers, 21 silk screen printing templates used to produce counterfeit documents, and nine handguns.

Court documents indicate that CFO cells in various U.S. cities are exceptionally well organized. CFO cell leaders typically keep schedules with the names of each counterfeit document vendor and the times they are to report to a designated area to sell fake documents. The local cell leaders also record the number and type of false documents sold by vendors during their “shifts,” as well the funds collected for each transaction.

The vendors are allowed to keep a portion of the proceeds, with the remainder passed to the local cell leader. Cell leaders, in turn, pass on a portion of the proceeds to the senior leaders of the CFO. Senior CFO leaders charge a “rent” or “franchise” fee of as much as \$15,000 per month for cell leaders to operate in a particular U.S. city. These funds and other proceeds of counterfeit document sales are funneled to Mexico and other locations for those overseeing the CFO.

The organization moves its funds through three primary methods. Often, funds are wire transferred via money transmitter businesses. In other cases, bulk cash and checks are moved through express parcel services. In addition, the organization often employs couriers who physically transport U.S. currency across U.S. borders and between U.S. cities.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.